

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 SS-15 EB-07 /033 W

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FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 9796

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: BBAK, HO

SUBJECT: STATUS OF ENRIQUE LOPEZ BALBOA

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 1520

1. ENRIQUE LOPEZ BALBOA, VICE PRESIDENT OF UNITED BRANDS LATIN AMERICAN OPERATIONS, AND HOUSTON LACOMBE, MANGER OF UB IN HONDURAS, REQUESTED AN URGENT MEETING WITH AMBASSADOR ON MORNING OF APRIL 20. IN MEETING, LOPEZ STATED THAT HE HAD PRESSING PERSONAL REASONS (A VERY SICK MOTHER-IN-LAW AND AN EXTREMELY WORRIED WIFE) FOR LEAVING HONDURAS. HE SAID THAT HE HAD TALKED TO JORGE ARTURO REINA, COORDINATOR OF THE INVESTIGATING COMMISSION ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS, AND HAD BEEN TOLD THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO REMAIN IN CONTRY UNTIL INVESTIGATING COMMISSION OBTAINED VERIFICATION OF LOPEZ' TESTIMONY CONCERNING UNITED BRANDS BRIBERY SCANDAL. IN THAT REGARD, INVESTIGATING COMMISSION WHICH HAD BEEN SCHEDULED TO LEAVE FOR UNITED STATES ON APRIL 20 HAS NOW RESCHEDULED ITS TRIP FOR APRIL 22.

2. LOPEZ SAID HE THOUGHT THAT IT WAS ABSURD FOR THE COMMISSION TO KEEP HIM IN HONDURAS AFTER HE HAD GIVEN ALL HIS TESTIMONY. HE OBSERVED THAT THE COMMISSION WOULD PROBABLY FIND IT IMPOSSIBLE TO VERIFY BRIBE CHARGES IN ANY ABSOLUTE FORM, THAT IS, WITH DULY AUTHENTICATED DOCUMENTS AND INFORMATION. HE EMPHASIZED SEVERAL TIMES THAT HE DID NOT WANT TO EXACERBATE UB-GOH RELATIONS BY SEEMING TO "PROTEST TOO MUCH." HOWEVER, HE DID WANT EMBASSY ADVICE ON HOW TO PROCEED SO THAT HE

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CAN LEAVE THE COUNTRY ASAP.

3. THE AMBASSADOR ADVISED LOPEZ CONTACT REINA AND TELL HIM ABOUT THE URGENT PERSONAL REASONS HE HAS FOR LEAVING THE COUNTRY. THE AMBASSADOR ALSO ADVISED LOPEZ, IF THE COMMISSION CONTINUES TO DENY HIM PERMISSION TO LEAVE, TO CONTACT OUR CONSUL TO PRESENT THE FACTS INVOLVED IN THE COMMISSION REFUSAL.

4. LOPEZ AGREED TO ATTEMPT TO CONTACT REINA DURING THE AFTERNOON OF APRIL 20 TO EXPLAIN HIS POSITION. SUGGEST THIS MATTER BE TAKEN UP WHEN COMMISSION CALLS ON DEPARTMENT. EMBASSY BELIEVES IT WOULD BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE FOR EMBASSY TO PRESS ISSUE WITH GOH. SANCHEZ

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 20 APR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975TEGUCI01549
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750138-0840
From: TEGUCIGALPA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750433/aaaabesz.tel
Line Count: 75
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 TEGUCIGALPA 1520
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 09 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <09 SEP 2003 by KelleyW0>; APPROVED <10 SEP 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: STATUS OF ENRIQUE LOPEZ BALBOA
TAGS: BBAK, HO
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006